DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 678 JC 030 286

AUTHOR	Duncan, Mary Ellen
TITLE	Statement of the American Association of Community Colleges to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on "The State of American Higher Education: What Are Parents, Students, and Taxpayers Getting for Their Money?".
INSTITUTION	American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-05-13
NOTE	10p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Preparation ; *College Role; *Community Colleges; *Educational Legislation; *Financial Support; Job Training; Remedial Instruction; State Aid; State Federal Aid; Student Characteristics; Two Year College Students; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Higher Education Act Title IV; *Howard Community College MD

ABSTRACT

This statement to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce discusses the state of American higher education and the importance of community colleges in providing access. The author presents specific examples from her vantage point as President of Howard Community College (Maryland). She calls the two-year institution the "Ellis Island" of higher education, enrolling almost 50% of the minority population of undergraduate students as well as part-time and older students. However, the persistence gap between less affluent and more affluent students has widened over time. The need-based programs in Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) can fill this gap. The HEA has proven extremely effective in providing financing to students and families who need resources to attend college. The author praises America's higher education system as being the best in the world. Community colleges enroll 44% of all undergraduates, provide job training to millions (including 65% of new healthcare workers), and offer lower tuitions than four-year institutions. Federal and state aid has a direct impact on tuition and student ability to attend college. In addition, college preparation and academic rigor in the K-12 system will help ease the community college's burden of providing remedial education to under-prepared students. (Author/EMH)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 476 678

Statement of the American Association of Community Colleges to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce

on *"The State of American Higher Education: What are Parents, Students, and Taxpayers getting for their Money?"*

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Carey

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Presented by Mary Ellen Duncan, Ph.D.
President, Howard Community College

Tuesday, May 13, 2003, 2:00 p.m.
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Good afternoon. My name is Mary Ellen Duncan and I am president of Howard Community College located in Columbia, Md. I am pleased to be with you today to present testimony on behalf of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) on the state of American higher education and the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). AACC represents almost 1,100 public and private, associate degree granting, regionally accredited institutions, and serves as the national voice for community colleges.

It is appropriate that community colleges be represented at this overview hearing on higher education. To a large degree, the growth that is commonly referred to as "the community college movement" occurred largely because of the programs authorized by the HEA. In the fall of 2001, community colleges had credit enrollments of over 6 million students, and about 5 million noncredit students. These numbers have surged over the last couple of years, and this trend shows no signs of abating. Community colleges are the first choice for the workers challenged by our sluggish economy. Most of our colleges report that the recent spikes in enrollments, which have pressed our institutions to the limit, have been due to both the "baby boom echo" of traditional college-aged students, as well as older individuals who are employed or recently became unemployed.

Community colleges enroll 44% of all U.S. undergraduates (measured in terms of head-count), and 45% of first-time freshmen. Almost two-thirds, 63%, are enrolled on a part-time basis of fewer than 12 credit hours. The average age of our students is 29 years. Because community colleges enroll 46% of all African-American undergraduate students,
55% of all Hispanic students, and 46% of Asian/Pacific Islander students in higher education, they pride themselves on being the "Ellis Island" of higher education.

At Howard Community College, 2,300 students received financial aid in the current award year. Of these students, approximately 1,400 benefited from Federal Pell grants and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), totaling $1.7 million. Financial aid recipients represent approximately 26% of our total credit students

TC030286

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

enrolled in the 2002-2003 award year. More than half of our financial aid applicants are independent students, and many of these are single parents and minorities.

Title IV Programs and Participation in Postsecondary Education

As Congress sets to reauthorize the HEA, it deserves thanks for having done so much to make college possible for those who otherwise would not have had the chance to improve their lives through higher education. The college continuation rate for recent high school graduates has risen from 47% in1973 (just as the central student aid programs of the HEA were being implemented) to 62% in 2001. The genius of creating a student-focused system in which aid is delivered to the individual, for use at the college of his or her choosing, has repeatedly proven itself. But this investment is one that not only accrues to the individual; our economy would be incalculably weaker if not for the increased education and training fostered by the Title IV student aid programs.

Student aid works. AACC strongly supports the current programs and basic structure of the HEA, and does not believe that the Act is flawed in any fundamental way. Rather, reauthorization provides an opportunity to make a system that is working well function even better. Our colleges view themselves as having a pact with the federal government: community colleges strive to keep tuitions as low as possible, but for those who cannot meet the cost of education, the need-based programs in Title IV of the HEA are there to fill the gap. And there is a consensus that the HEA has proven extremely efficient and effective in providing financing to students and families who need resources to attend college.

Federal student aid represents close to 70% of all the student aid made available across the country (most of the rest consists of institutional grants from private colleges). American higher education would be radically different without it. Furthermore, the student financial aid programs are well targeted—those who need financial assistance the most are generally those who receive it. More than 90% of all Pell Grant funds are awarded to students with family incomes of less than $40,000.

Unfortunately, the job of promoting equal access to postsecondary education is not yet complete. Access to college remains highly stratified by income. Over the last 25 years, a "rising tide" has lifted the college participation rates of students across the income spectrum fairly equally, with the largest gains occurring in the second lowest income quartile. This is a great achievement. Unfortunately, the persistence gap between less affluent and more affluent students has widened over that time. And, despite the gains in overall college access, the gaps in college participation across the various income bands have remained fairly consistent. We believe these gaps must be eliminated; with that will come the end of the current condition in which low-ability, high-income students are likelier to attend college than low-income, high ability students.

What Have Parents, Students and Taxpayers Gotten for Their Money?

The short answer to the question posed by today's hearing is: the best system of higher education in the world, a system that is not only the envy of other countries but also the nation's sixth largest net export. Support for higher education has fostered the world's strongest economy, with productivity gains resulting from a better skilled workforce as well as the research that is conducted in America's colleges and universities. The holders of a bachelor's degree, with no education beyond that, can answer this question by responding that, on average (according to the U.S. Census Bureau), they have received about $750,000 more in lifetime earnings compared to those holding just a high school diploma. Those with an associate degree could answer that their lifetime earnings increased by about $335,000 compared to high school graduates. Obviously, complex sets of aptitudes and abilities give rise to these enhanced earnings. However, higher education is not just about earnings. Our higher education system produces a better-informed citizenry that participates in civil and political discourse, essential to a smoothly functioning democracy. Our society benefits, tangibly and intangibly, from a better educated populace.

Community Colleges and the Workforce

A first principle of community colleges is providing their local communities with the workers they need. A correlate important goal is to provide individuals with the skills that they need to attain economic independence. In the last 25 years, the percentage of workers with an associate degree, certificate, or some college has more than doubled from 12% to 27% of the workforce. The array of occupational programs offered by community colleges is truly mind-boggling, and permeates every sector of the economy. Our colleges pride themselves on their entrepreneurial nature. For example, when Howard County's executive asked us to create a photonics program to support the fiber optics companies in our community, we responded within six months.

In all of the fields in which high-profile labor shortages exist, such as teaching, nursing, information technology, and first responders, community colleges are on the front lines, offering programs designed to address these pressing needs. For example, 48% of all applicants taking the national registered nurse examination to become licensed professional registered nurses were graduates of associate degree programs, and these graduates pass that examination at the same rate as those who have attended four-year colleges. 65% of new healthcare workers get their training at community colleges. Community colleges also train and credential 85% of the nation's first responders—police, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians.

Community colleges do not receive adequate recognition for their role in educating the nation's teachers. It is estimated that at least 25% of graduates of undergraduate programs in teacher training began their postsecondary education at community colleges. Community colleges provide this initial teacher preparation, but also are heavily engaged in professional development for K-12 teachers; post-baccalaureate certification for undergraduate majors in non-teaching fields; encouraging high school students to enter the teaching field, and training the paraprofessionals whose skills must be enhanced as a result of the "No Child Left Behind" law. Consequently, AACC is

proposing that a small new program in the Higher Education Act be created to help community colleges further their activity in this critical area. We seek a national competitive grant program of $20 million. Howard Community College is now offering an Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree in elementary education that will fully articulate into the teaching training programs at Maryland's four-year public colleges and the AAT in secondary education is currently under development.

States consciously use community colleges in their economic development strategy, through programs that are designed in part to attract and keep businesses. A recent survey by the Education Commission of the States showed that at least 21 states provide special funding to community colleges to train workers for high-demand occupations. Thirty-two states provide funding to support customized training for employers.

Most colleges contract directly with a wide variety of businesses to provide the customized training to meet their needs. These programs are developed rapidly according to customer specifications. 95% of businesses and organizations that use them recommend community college workforce education and training programs.

The Accountability Debate

Community colleges embrace the accountability discussion because they are already highly accountable. In fact, colleges already provide a great deal of accountability information to federal, state, and local governments and accreditation agencies, and welcome every chance they have to explain how they are accountable for the funds they receive.

Proponents of greater accountability often claim that community colleges and other higher education institutions graduate an insufficient percentage of their students, or that their program quality is lacking. The astonishing diversity of higher education, whose non-profit institutions alone serve more than 16 million students each year, tends to get lost in these generalizations.

Let me mention three examples at HCC: this week I received an invitation to hear Jessica Swink, soprano, sing at the Kennedy Center. She took only music classes at Howard, because she did not qualify for financial aid even though she was one of 10 children. Swink studied part-time and would only take music classes until she became an apprentice to the Washington Opera. Though Swink may never get a college degree, I am likely to hear her sing at the Metropolitan Opera House one day. On the other hand, Marcus Bryant, an African-American student, with high grades, turned down offers to four-year colleges to attend HCC because he did not want to accumulate debt. He will transfer to Georgia Tech or Carnegie Mellon and study mechanical engineering. And just this week, an 80-year old man complained because he couldn't get into an accounting class (no available seats), but I guaranteed I would get him registered early next semester. These are some of the people who become statistics in the reporting

process. HCC's motto is "You can get there from here." Students decide the "there" and that's the way it should be.

Community colleges alone have an enormous variety of programs and goals: to provide basic transfer education in academic areas; to give adult basic education to those who need it; to allow incumbent or unemployed workers to upgrade their skills; to provide language education for those who lack facility in English; and to help businesses get the workers they need in short order. These various functions will have different desired outcomes attached to them. It is also important to remember that not all students who enroll at a community college plan to earn an associate degree.

The competitive nature of higher education ensures that the ultimate goals of accountability—quality and efficiency—will be generated. The portable nature of the federal student aid programs neatly complements our competitive higher education system, empowering people to make their own choices about which college suits them best, whether they be deciding between Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley, or between Kingsborough Community College in New York and the local ITT Technology Institute. Students themselves know better than anyone else how committed they are to completing a program.

Community colleges currently report substantial amounts of performance-related information to a variety of external bodies, and this includes the federal government. States provide about 42% of the overall annual revenues of community colleges and local governments add another 18%. These entities have developed extensive and growing reporting requirements. AACC has provided some information on state reporting to the Committee. Accrediting bodies and the sponsors of other programs, government and private, also demand reporting of various kinds, including reporting on outcomes. Accreditation also demands continual institutional self-assessment, a data-driven process. For example, an important focus of Middle States is on learning outcomes assessments. The North Central region has a process that parallels the National Baldrige quality model.

Congress obviously has a legitimate need to ensure that its enormous investment in student financial aid is well spent. However, community colleges urge this Committee to think carefully before it places new accountability mandates on institutions. We believe that the focus should be on providing data that will help students make more informed choices about the college best suited to their needs and goals. Wherever possible, Congress should strive to let colleges use information that they are already generating for other purposes. For example, at HCC there are five full-time employees and several part-timers who respond to accountability requirements from local, state, federal, and accrediting agencies. Unfunded mandates erode dollars from direct services to students, especially at a time when local and state governments are withdrawing support and enrollment is growing.

In its Dec. 30 HEA reauthorization submission to this Committee, AACC stated the openness of its member institutions to report to the federal government new outcomes

information. We also think that different types of institutions should provide different types of information. For example, many community colleges will want to report on the attainment of skills certificates and industry certifications by their graduates, as well as their wage gains. Liberal arts colleges may find these measurements inappropriate to their missions and programs. Congress should recognize that the 3,600 non-profit institutions of higher education, which now enroll over 16 million students, should not be looked at through the same lens.

Congress should also ask if it is always desirable for every student to graduate, or whether colleges are now being used for other purposes as well. Community colleges are under extreme pressure from local employers to provide more short-term training to help workers keep pace with changing skill requirements. A growing body of data shows that significant economic gains accrue to those who receive some postsecondary education, but not a degree. According to the Census Bureau, in 2001 the average salary of a high school graduate was $23,470. The average salary for an individual who had attended a postsecondary institution but had not attained an associate degree was $28,245—a difference of almost $5,000, more than 20%. In addition, the children of those who attend any amount of postsecondary education are much more likely to enroll in college than those whose parents have no postsecondary education experience. The fact that these students don't receive a sheepskin is no sign of failure.

In this reauthorization, Congress should focus on the enormous impediment to graduation created by the huge and growing number of students who are working. Studies show that when students work more than 15 hours per week, their likelihood of graduating declines sharply. Unfortunately, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the 1999-2000 academic year 84% of community college students worked, 54% of them full-time. This intensity of work involvement may be due to student financing needs, or because the student was employed full-time before enrolling in college. Nationally, according to the National Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, low-income students average 24 hours of work each week. Common sense suggests that a lack of persistence and graduation will correlate with part-time enrollment in college; the longer it takes a student to complete his or her coursework, the likelier that external factors will deter that student from achieving a degree or certificate.

Community colleges accept from the start that, for many reasons, not all of their students will graduate. Some important factors include lack of adequate financing; the rigors of employment; family and other personal reasons; or because a student's goal of improved employment prospects have been met. In addition, some students are able to transfer to a four-year institution without obtaining a two-year degree. Furthermore, in some cases students will find that college is just not right for them. However, community colleges ardently believe that these cases are the unavoidable consequence of a system that operates with an open-door admissions policy, and that what some might label a failure is rather an ongoing, but reasonable, price that the nation's system of higher education must absorb. Congress should remember that, for community colleges nationally, the majority of the cost of educating students rests with state and local governments.

College Tuitions

Students, their families, and legislators have good reason to be worried about college costs. For many college students, tuition is rising faster than family incomes, a situation that causes deep and persistent concern throughout higher education. Community colleges are particularly sensitive to tuition increases because of their high enrollments of low-income students, for whom relatively small tuition hikes can stand in the way of enrollment.

Community colleges are surprised and disappointed by the current battery of criticisms about college tuitions. The simple fact is that college tuitions are, across a broad range of institutions, extremely affordable, and represent the best investment most individuals will ever make. According to the College Board, in the fall of 2002 the average tuition and fees charged at a two-year public institution of higher education was just $1,735. The average tuition and fees charged by public four-year colleges were $4,081. Roughly 80% of the students in non-profit higher education attend these institutions. The average cost of a baccalaureate degree at a four-year public college is now about two-thirds of the average cost of a new American automobile. Therefore, it is hard to understand why tuition charges are thought be inordinate, given the economic returns that accrue to participation in higher education as outlined above. Also, the tuition that students pay is only a small fraction of the overall costs of educating them, whether it be at a public or independent institution.

Community colleges raise their tuitions as a last resort. It is just plain wrong to think otherwise. Last fall, tuitions at two-year public institutions rose on average by 7.9%. This regrettable hike came after a series of tuition increases in academic years 1995-96 to 2000-01 that, according to the National Center on Education Statistics, were as follows: 3.9%, 2.9%, 3.0%, 1.0%, 0.8%, and 1.6%--an average of 2.2%. At HCC, tuition remained the same in FY99, 00, and 01. The increase since 1999 ($81) to 2003 ($86) has been 6.2%. From 1999 to FY2004 ($90), it will be 11.1%. Reductions in state aid are directly related to these increases and I'll talk about that more in a moment.

In virtually every case, the recent large tuition increases were a direct outgrowth of state and, in some cases, local funding reductions. These cuts have been unprecedented in their severity, and have often occurred in the middle of the academic year. The current round of tuition hikes came after community colleges were forced to tell faculty that they were being laid off, or notify students that classes they were counting on to complete their programs were being cancelled, or that candidates who had expected to be enrolling in nursing or other high-demand programs would have to wait another year. We regret to report that early signs indicate that community college tuitions will be rising this coming fall at an even higher overall percentage than they did last year. The colleges have no choice. For example, the Governor of California has proposed raising the fees charged for each credit at the state's community colleges from $11 to $24.

At Howard Community College, we have been forced to raise our tuitions, but this has been coupled with a hiring freeze for all positions. Howard Community College, like all

community colleges in Maryland, is funded by a formula. However, because of reductions by state government made to balance the state budget, we have received about $2 million less over the last two years than we would have received if our statutory aid formula had been followed. We have stopped making new investments in every corner of our operation. In addition, our college, as a matter of policy, devotes a portion of the money that is derived from tuition increases to scholarships. All this has been coupled with unprecedented increases in enrollments. At HCC, we have been averaging about 7% increase each year for the last 4 years. The fall numbers will be even higher.

AACC strongly contests the claim that federal student aid increases cause higher tuitions at community colleges. For example, between the 1995-96 and 2001-02 academic years, thanks to generous appropriations, the maximum Pell Grant was increased by $1,410, from $2,340 to $3,750. Over that same span, according to the College Board, the average tuition and fees at two-year public institutions increased by just $278, from $1,330 to $1,608. Also during this period, the Hope Scholarship tax credit of up to $1,500 was put into place. It simply is not true that institutions consider the availability of federal aid when setting their tuitions. (In many states, of course, tuition is set by legislatures, not the colleges.) Community colleges are pleased to report that this strong Congressional support for the Pell Grant program has translated into increased access. In fact, the Pell Grant recipient pool increased by almost one million students, to 4.9 million, over just the last two years.

Lastly, it may be that certain factors endemic to the academic enterprise cause the cost of educating students to rise at a faster rate than most other goods and services. For better or worse, college is a labor-intensive enterprise in which the application of technology to achieve productivity gains is not possible to the degree that it is in manufacturing and even other service industries. And the cost of technology itself is dear. However, community colleges strive to keep their costs of education as well as the tuitions they charge at levels that allow for widespread access. Their average cost of educating a student is about 60% that of educating a student at a public four-year institution.

College Preparation

As Congress looks at the state of higher education, it should focus on college preparation. College is the key to the American dream, but not all students are given the same tools to take advantage of it. Academic achievement from the earliest ages remains strongly tied to economic background. Numerous studies show that college participation is related to students taking rigorous high school curriculums. Hopefully, reforms in elementary and secondary education will result in greater numbers of students taking more challenging academic coursework and succeeding at it.

More than any other sector of higher education, community colleges pay the price for under-prepared students. This is becoming ever more the case as four-year institutions ratchet up their admissions standards. Community colleges are open-door institutions, but that is not the same thing as allowing students to enroll in the program of their choice. Community colleges routinely undertake assessments of all new students so that

they can determine their readiness for specific programs. They devote large amounts of resources to providing education designed to ready students for their offerings. Some of this is delivered to recent high school graduates, while much of it is provided to individuals who have been out of school for years. Remedial math is more frequently required than reading or writing; the need for these services is concentrated in urban areas.

Howard Community College has benefited greatly from a TRIO Student Support Services grant. The program has had a tremendously beneficial impact on the ability of 225 eligible students to complete their programs. Over two-thirds of the students are low income, first-generation college students and/or students with disabilities. 42%-47% are minority students (compared to HCC's 35% overall), and 60% of all the students are low-income. All of these students have a need for academic support in personal, career and retention counseling as well as individualized advising and tutoring, help with improving study skills, leadership development and development of self-advocacy skills. Even though this program serves a population that has the most barriers to academic success, the program consistently demonstrates its effectiveness by meeting and/or exceeding a set of measurable objectives.

For community colleges, it is not just a matter of selecting the best students but bringing out the best in all students who apply themselves in our colleges. The federal government is a big element in the fulfillment of our mission.

AACC is pleased to have the opportunity to present this testimony to the Committee, and looks forward to working cooperatively with you over the coming months.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").